



Athlete Profile (Local)

Tamara Lawter – It's the Camaraderie



Kearney, Neb. resident Tamara Lawter, 43, will be competing in her fifteenth National Veterans Wheelchair Games this July in Omaha. Lawter joined the Army in 1986, in part, to gain educational benefits. She served her military time in Fort Stewart, Ga. In 1994, Lawter had completed a training program at Fort Bragg and was driving back to Fort Stewart when she was involved in an automobile accident that resulted in a serious spinal cord injury. Although she had hoped to make the Army her career, the accident changed that. Although she is now a paraplegic, Lawter did not let her injuries stop her from succeeding in life. "Besides walking, not much else has changed," she said. "I do many of the same things – I just do them from a wheelchair."

Lawter first learned about the National Veterans Wheelchair Games while she was still in the hospital in Augusta, Ga. "My physical therapist got me interested in the Games," she remembers. "They showed me videos and it looked like a lot of fun. For about six months we talked about sports and the event, and the physical therapists continually had me trying new things." It was not long before she was competing. At the 2008 Games, Lawter will compete in weightlifting, softball, handcycling, shot-put and discus. To prepare for the handcycling event, Lawter is now riding ten to fifteen miles a week and hopes to increase her weekly distances as the Games get closer. She also looks forward to beginning her weight training to further prepare for the rigorous competition. At the July event, Lawter will also participate in the sled hockey exhibition. "We have a sled hockey team in Kearney," she said. "The arena was very generous with ice time for us."

Having competed in the National Veterans Wheelchair Games for so many years, Tamara Lawter can easily tell you what keeps her coming back. "It's the camaraderie. I love the competition and seeing everyone from year to year." She explained that it's not just seeing old friends, but meeting so many new acquaintances that result from participating in the Games. Lawter firmly believes that all wheelchair users who are veterans should get out and try to participate, especially those who are newly injured. She said, "Often they don't think they can do anything so they don't try. They don't realize what is out there and what is possible." The physical therapists who worked with Lawter after her accident were very helpful in helping her understand the possibilities. "When I compete in sports, I feel like a normal person. It doesn't feel like I have a disability."

Lawter, the mother of two boys, fulfilled her early goal of continuing her education and earned a bachelor's degree in interdisciplinary studies. Now, she has set some new goals. "In addition to wanting to do well in all of my competitions at the Games this summer, I want to learn more about other sports and meet a lot of new people."

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